

Support for thousands with musculoskeletal conditions as government tackles inactivity

28.3.2026 - | Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs

Thousands of people with back, joint and muscle issues have been assessed quicker following a landmark initiative which aims to help people stay in, or move back into, work.

- Government intervention leads to significant reduction of 20% in long waits NHS waiting lists for patients with muscle, bone and joint conditions.
- 'Getting it Right First Time' Programme aims include supporting people with MSK conditions get off community waiting lists and return to work sooner.
- Results highlight new approach to tackling economic inactivity and waiting list backlogs

In all, around 7,500 people living with musculoskeletal issues (MSK) in areas of the country with the longest waiting times were seen quicker thanks to an NHS pilot backed by £3.5 million of investment from the Department for Work and Pensions.

The pilot trialled new digital tools to help people manage their conditions remotely, and innovative one-day clinics that bring health specialists and mental health support and physical activity services together, allowing people to engage with multiple services in one visit.

It's part of the Government's drive to tackle economic inactivity - with around 2.8 million people signed off due to long-term sickness, with more than half a million because of MSK - and bring down NHS waiting lists.

The funding has contributed to a 20 percent cut in 18 plus week community MSK waiting lists in 17 areas between December 2024 and March 2025.

Minister for Employment Dame Diana Johnson MP said:

No one should feel locked out of work due to health issues. We invested in this support to help people get well and get working.

The results are clear: musculoskeletal patients are getting the help they need and innovation supports them to get one step closer to work and gets people off waiting lists.

Getting Britain working remains a key priority, and this support is one tangible way we are doing it.

It comes alongside a wider support offer that meets sick or disabled people where they are - backed by £3.5 billion by the end of the decade.

Connect to Work will provide personalised help for 300,000 people by 2030, while 1,000 Pathways to

Work advisers are now based in Jobcentres across England, Wales and Scotland, offering personalised help to people on health-related benefits with no requirement to work – many of whom had no support before.

The MSK pilot supports the government's 10 Year Health Plan and Neighbourhood Health Service vision, giving patients access to a range of services under one roof.

On 26 March, the government announced 27 Neighbourhood Health Centres will be open by 2027, offering urgent treatment, GP and pharmacy services. The first 50 centres of a total 250, are backed by £200 million in total investment.

Health Minister Stephen Kinnock said:

The success of this scheme shows how this government is taking a new approach to cutting NHS waiting lists, modernising the NHS, and getting people healthy and back into work.

Offering multiple services under one roof, with tailored care for that specific person, is part of our mission to build a true Neighbourhood Health Service

With more care in the community, everyone wins. Patients get the best care, and the NHS gets people back to work, boosting economic growth.

The overall NHS waiting list is the lowest it's been for three years, but the government is doubling down - with record investment and modern, innovative approaches to care ensuring people get seen more quickly as we rebuild the NHS.

Professor Tim Briggs, National Director for Clinical Improvement and Elective Recovery at NHS England, said:

Back pain, arthritis and other musculoskeletal conditions are key causes of sickness absence so it's great news for thousands of patients that these NHS pilots cut waiting lists by 20 per cent, helping many back into employment.

It is especially encouraging that the NHS England Getting It Right First Time initiative led to some innovative ways of working among the participating NHS teams, allowing patients to receive help from multiple services in one visit – including mental health, employment support and debt management advice.

Additional information

- Cohort 2 of the scheme is currently ongoing and is being implemented in six Integrated Care

Boards, supported by a £2.2 million funding boost. We are taking forward the success of this pilot and future plans will be shared in due course.

- The Community Delivery Programme Cohort 1 ran from December 2024 to March 2025 across 17 NHS areas.
- MSK conditions are the leading cause of Years Lived with Disability in England and a major driver of GP appointments.
- Further information on the Getting It Right First Time programme is available at gettingitrightfirsttime.co.uk
- The 17 NHS areas are:
 - Birmingham and Solihull ICB
 - Bristol, North Somerset & South Gloucestershire ICB
 - Cambridgeshire and Peterborough ICB
 - Cheshire (NHS Cheshire and Merseyside ICB) ICB
 - Cornwall ICB
 - Devon ICB
 - Dorset ICB
 - Greater Manchester ICB - Manchester / Oldham
 - Hampshire and Isle of Wight ICB
 - Leicester Leicestershire & Rutland ICB
 - Norfolk and Waveney ICB
 - North Central London ICB
 - North East and North Cumbria ICB
 - North East London ICB
 - Northamptonshire ICB
 - Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin ICB
 - Sussex ICB

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/support-for-thousands-with-musculoskeletal-conditions-as-government-tackles-inactivity>